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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of an empirical study designed to test three hypotheses concerning the type of humor initiated by faculty in their interpersonal communication: (1) the organizational type of person is associated with the type of humor he initiates; (2) cosmopolitans tend to initiate abrasive humor more often than lubricant humor; and (3) locals tend to initiate lubricant humor more often than abrasive humor. The data were collected at the University of Wisconsin (Milwaukee) by personal interviews with a random sample of 70 faculty members from nine randomly selected academic departments of the College of Letters and Science. All three hypotheses were supported by the data. The paper concludes with a discussion of practical implications of the research findings for organizational communication and effectiveness, limitations of the present study, and some directions for further research. (Author/RB)

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A STUDY OF HUMOR INITIATE. BY COSMOPOLITAN AND LOCALS IN AN URBAN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF HUMOR INITIATED BY COSMOPOLITANS AND LOCALS IN AN URBAN UNIVERSITY

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This paper presents the results of an empirical study designed to test three hypotheses concerning the type of humor initiated by faculty in their interpersonal communication: (1) the organizational type (cosmopolitan-local orientation) of person is associated with the type of humor he initiates, (2) cosmopolitans tend to initiate abrasive humor more often than lubricant humor and (3) locals tend to initate lubricant humor more often than abrasive humor.

The study was conducted in the College of Letters and Science of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The data were collected in Spring, 1973 by personal interviews with a random sample of seventy faculty members from nine randomly selected academic department of the college. Organizational type (cosmopolitan-local orientation) of each faculty member was measured by his responses to 12 Likert-type rating scales reflecting organizational loyalty, commitment to the profession and reference group orientation. The type of humor (abrasive or lubricant) initiated by each faculty member was measured by his responses to 13 Likert-type rating scales reflecting perceptions of the type of humor initiated in interpersonal communication with colleagues. For each of the two variables in the study, organizational type and type of humor initiated, respondents were classified into three approximately equal size groups based on their scores in the frequency distribution of respective indices for the two variables. In terms of organizational type, respondents were classifed as cosmopolitans, locals, or "intermediates." In terms of the type of humor initiated respondents were classifed as initiators of abrasive, lubricant or "intermediate" type of humor. The categories of "intermediates" were excluded from statistical analysis since we were interested in the relationship between two ideal types of each of the two variables in the study.

The three hypotheses were tested by Chi square analysis at the .05 level of significance. All three hypotheses were supported by the data. Thus, we found that the organizational type of a faculty member was associated with the type of humor he initiated. Also, we found that cosmopolitan type of faculty tended to initiate abrasive humor more often than lubricant humor whereas locals tended to initiate lubricant humor more often than abrasive humor.

The paper concludes with a discussion of practical implications of these research findings for organizational communication and effectiveness, limitations of the present study, and some directions for further research in this relatively neglected area of organizational communication.

A Study of Humor Initated by Cosmopolitans and Locals in an Urban University

Janet G. Lukens and Nemi C. Jain

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This paper presents the results of an empirical study that was designed to examine the nature of humor initated by faculty members in an urban university. More specifically, the study tested three hypotheses concerning relationships between organizational type of person and the type of humor he initiates.

Humor is a peculiarly human phenomenon. No wonder that this distinctively human activity has preoccupied philosophers ever since antiquity and that psychology, especially psychoanalysis, following Freud's lead, has devoted much attention to its analysis and interpretation. Yet there have been few attempts at a sociological analysis of humor, especially in complex organizational settings. The literature contains hardly any generalizations about the nature and functions of humor initiated by organizational members in their interpersonal communication. The relative neglect of the study of humor in organizational settings by communication scholars is surprising, as humor is an important facet of interpersonal communication in organizations.

Much of past research pertaining to use of humor within organizations has been primarily concerned with facilitative aspects of humor[1]. The over-emphasis upon facilitative aspects and relative disregard for discordant functions of humor may stem from the early studies of joking relationships undertaken by anthropologist, Radcliffe-Brown and his successors. By definition a joking relationship is a ritualistic form of joking, usually associated with kinship, which serves the function of a release mechanism for reducing feelings of aggression and hostility (Radcliffe-Brown, 1949). Studies of joking relationships in industry (Bradney, 1957; Sykes, 1966) were primarily concerned with ways in which humor facilitated harmony and reduced ill-feeling among members of the organization. Currently there has been a growing recognition for the need to study both facilitative and discordant functions of humor within organizations (Kennedy, 1970; Martineau, 1972). Martineau stated:

> To realize and explore the full potential of this area of study, we advocate that humor be viewed from the sociological perspective as a "lubricant" and an "abrasive" in social interaction--especially in such common everyday interaction that constitutes the basis of the social order and makes the routine flow of social life possible. By this we mean, to use an analogy, that on the one hand, the interjection of the humorous serves as oil pumped from an oil can. Humor is intended to initiate social interaction and to keep the machinery of interaction operating freely and smoothly. Indeed, sometimes it may not be sufficient. But perhaps most often this is its intention and objective function. On the other hand, but not mutually exclusive from the former, humor may serve as an abrasive. Rather than oiling the workings of social interaction, it constitutes a measure of sand. The consequences of such abrasive humor is interpersonal friction and a juncture in the communication process which may modify the character of the interaction. (Martineau, 1972:103).

Drawing upon the theoretical work of Martineau (1972), the two types of humor, abrasive and lubricant humor, discussed in the present study are defined as follows:

> Abrasive Humor: Abrasive humor functions as an irritant and may induce tension in the process of interaction in a social situation. The potentially disruptive effect of the humor may either be immediate and short lived or persisting depending upon the intensity of the abrasiveness. Abrasive humor included humor which

[1] For a detailed discussion of this point, see Kennedy (1970).

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is sarcastic or cynical made by a person about his surroundings (e.g., the organization in which he works). Abrasive humor is tension inducing rather than tension reducing.

Lubricant Humor: Lubricant humor is initiated to facilitate social interaction and to keep the "machinery of interaction" operating freely and smoothly. It oils the workings of interaction and makes the individuals involved feel free and more congenial towards one another. An example of this type of humor is the "canned joke" or "friendly insult" where nothing derogatory is really meant. Lubricant humor is often initiated in tense situations to "loosen things up." It is tension reducing rather than tension inducing.

A review of literature dealing with humor, organizational behavior and organizational communication revealed a general lack of studies on the variables associated with the initiation of lubricant and abrasive humor in formal organizations. We were concerned with studying the differences in the type of humor initiated by a person might vary according to his age, sex, organizational status, and other demographic characteristics, we were interested in determining the differences in humor initiated by persons of different organizational types.

Organizational types have been characterized in several ways depending on the nature of the organization. In academic settings, industry, and research and development laboratories, a common typology for characterizing organizational types has been as cosmopolitans and locals. Since Gouldner's (1957) study of faculty orientations in a small college, the terms cosmopolitans and locals and related hyphenated neologisms such as "professionals-organizationals", "research man-organization man," specialists-institutionalists" and "science-oriented-company-oriented," have been used by social scientists to characterize the differential attachments, loyalties, reference group orientations and values of organizational members (Goldberg, et al., 1965). A basic assumption commonly employed by researchers in their use of these terms is that the concepts refer to competing, antithetical or bipolar syndromes. Consequently, people in organizations can be classified as either locals or cosmopolitans. In the present study the two organizational types, cosmopolitans and locals, are conceived as defined by Alvin Gouldner:

Cosmopolitans: Those low on loyalty to the employing organization, high on commitment to specialized role skills, and likely to use an outer reference group orientation.

Locals: Those high on loyalty to the employing organization, low on commitment to specialized role skills, and likely to use an inner reference group orientation. (Gouldner, 1957:290)

This kind of conceptualization has been common until very recently in theoretical and empirical work concerned with the orientations found within universities and industrial research and development laboratories. Recently there have been attempts to verify the unidimensionality and structure of the cosmopolitan-local construct as generally specified in the work of Gouldner (1957). Golberg, et

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al. (1965), based on a review of several factor analytic studies and a study of their own, concluded that a strong professional orientation is not incompatible with a strong organizational orientation. Grimes and Berger (1970) evaluated this construct and concluded that the empirical evidence on cosmopolitan-local dimensions and their interrelationships and overlap is weak and inconsistent. In spite of some inconsistency between the theoretical formulation and subsequent empirical work on the construct, there is considerable support for Gouldner's (1957) initial conceptualization of the cosmopolitan-local construct (Berger and Grimes, 1973). There seems, moreover, to be continuing evidence on the relevance of the cosmopolitan-local typology as a conceptual framework within which other organizational problems can be fruitfully studied (Berger and Grimes, 1973).

The concept of organizational type and resulting ideal types of cosmopolitans and locals provides a useful framework for examining differences in type of humor initiated by faculty memebers in a university. Although there have been some studies concerning communication behaviors and professional activities of persons of different organizational types, we did not find any study of the type of humor used by cosmopolitans and locals. For instance, Alfred G. Smith, in his study of communication patterns of personnel at the Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration at the University of Oregon, found several differences in the communication behaviors of two types or organizational members--the research man and the organizational man (Smith, 1966). The organizational type, cosmopolitan, is similar to Smith's research man and the local is similar to Smith's organization man. He found that organization men and research men differed in their communication behavior patterns. For instance, Smith reported:

> In terms of communication, the organiztion man makes sure that his messages go through proper channels, while the research man makes sure that his messages go through. Channels, bureaucratic structure and even the Center itself are not good things in their own right for the research man. Instead, the Center is a means for achieving something beyond itself. (Smith, 1966:30).

In view of the previous work on the nature of differences in orientation, communication behaviors and professional activities of cosmopolitans and locals (Gouldner, 1957; Gouldner, 1958; Smith, 1966; Shuster, 1970) we feel that humor initiated by these two organizational types will be consistent with their differences in orientation and organizational loyalty. In essence, cosmopolitans will be more inclined to initiateabrasive humor rather than lubricant humor since they are low on loyalty to the employing organization and do not care much for maintaining harmonious relationships with their immediate colleagues or inner reference groups. In their concern for specialized role skills and outer reference group orientation, cosmopolitans may attempt to avoid communication with immediate colleagues through their use of abrasive humor towards them. A cosmopolitan's abrasive humor, thus, would reflect his minimal concern for establishingand maintaining supportive relationships with his coworkers within the organization.

The local, on the other hand, will tend to use lubricant humor more often than abrasive humor as he displays high organizational loyalty and tends to exhibit an inner reference group orientation. In his concern for maintaining close

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interpersonal relationships with his immediate colleagues he will be likely to initiate lubricant humor. His efforts to minimize interpersonal tension and conflict will be expressed through his use of lubricant humor.

Thus, we postulated and tested the following three hypotheses concerning the relationship between organizational type and type of humor initiated:

Hypothesis 1: The organizational type of person is associated with the type of humor he initiates. (Null hypothesis: The organizational type of person is not associated with the type of humor he initiates.)

Hypothesis 2: Cosmopolitans tend to initate abrasive humor more often than lubricant humor. (Null hypothesis: There is no difference among cosmopolitans in the frequency of initiating abrasive humor and lubricant humor.)

Hypothesis 3: Locals tend to initate lubricant humor more often than abrasive humor. (Null hypothesis: there is no difference among locals in the frequency of initiating abrasive and lubricant humor.)

Methodology[2]

Since the present study's intent was to examine the relationship between organizational type and type of humor initiated in academic settings, a field survey design was employed. The study was conducted in the College of Letters and Science of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, an urban university with over 20,000 students. The College of Letters and Science encompassed 30 academic departments from many diverse academic areas such as physical sciences, biological sciences, social sciences and humanities.

A total of 77 faculty members were randomly selected for the study. The sampling procedure consisted of two stages: (1) random selection on nine departments including three small departments (having less than 10 faculty members), three medium size departments (having 10-20 faculty members) and three large departments (having over 20 faculty members), and (2) selection of respondents from these nine departments--from each of the medium and large size departments, 50% of the faculty members were randomly selected, whereas from the three small departments all faculty members were included in the study. Of the seventy-seven respondents selected for the study, four persons could not be interviewed and three respondents did not complete the measuring instrument containing items for measuring the organizational type of a respondent which left a total of seventy respondents for the final analysis.

Data for the study were collected by personal interviews which made use of a structured interview schedule and some self-administered instruments. The interview schedule included questions pertaining to demographic information about the respondents, and instrument for measuring his organizational type, and an instrument for evaluation of the type of humor initiated. The interviews were conducted by the senior author of this paper and 11 students, graduate and undergraduate, who underwent a training session covering the procedures for interviewing and use of the interview schedule and self administered instruments.

[2] For a detailed discussion of different aspects of methodology used in the present study, see Lukens (1973).

The data were collected during the spring of 1973. BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Organizational type or cosmopolitan-local orientation of a respondent was measured by a set of 12 items, each with a 5-point Likert type rating scale. Most of the items were selected from Gouldner (1957) but were slightly modified to suit the present research setting. Listed below are the 12 items which, following a scale analysis[3] were included in the construction of the index for organizational type. The first six are cosmopolitan-oriented and the last six are local-oriented items.

1. I do not find much satisfaction from being active on committees within the university.
2. A faculty member should be evaluated in terms of his dedication to his profession rather than in terms of this dedication to his department and university.
3. I do not like to attend many departmental activities as they are usually of little interest to me.
4. Not enough faculty here have a genuine interest in research and scholarship.
5. I prefer to associate with faculty members who actively engage in research and publish than with those who do less research.
6. Departmental and university activities do not interest me as much as professional activities outside of the university.
7. A faculty member should be less concerned with trying to climb academically within his department than with his interpersonal relations with other faculty members.
8. Even without the opportunity to do research I would find my job quite satisfying.
9. A faculty member should be more committed to his department and university than to the pursuit of his professional interests.
10. Selecting committees for new faculty too often overlook a prospective faculty member's ability or lack of ability for relating to others.
11. I resent the tendency to evaluate a faculty member primarily in terms of his research output and publications.
12. Aside from teaching, service to the department and university is more important than conducting one's own research.

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[3] Scale analysis consisted of two techniques and criteria: (1) the product moment correlation coefficient between the total scores of the items in the index and the individual items themselves, and (2) a t-test technique for assessing the ability of each scale item to differentiate between the groups with the highes and lowest scores.

[4] Although we had planned to form three equal size groups using 33rd and 66th percentiles as cutting points, slightly different cutting points were used to form three groups because of certain tied percentile scores.

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The construction of the instrument for measuring type of humor initiated stemmed from two procedures. First, the literature pertaining to the social functions of humor was reviewed and a list of key adjectives was compiled. Second, seventy-five students in an introductory communication course were asked to read statements characterizing abrasive and lubricant humor upon which they were requested to write two lists of ten or more adjectives for each of the two types of humor. The most frequently listed adjectives for each humor type were incorporated into the final measuring instrument.

In order to measure type of humor, each respondent was asked to rate his own humor to the extent that it corresponded with a given adjective. He was instructed to select one option from the 5-point Likert-type rating scale which he felt best portrayed his humor. Although 18 adjectives were included in the original measuring instrument, this number was reduced to 13 following the scale analysis.[5] Listed below are the 13 adjectives included in the final index for measuring a person's type of humor. The first four adjectives reflect lubricant humor, while the remaining nine reflect abrasive humor.

(1) Soothing, (2) easygoing, (3) tension-reducing, (4) relaxed, (5) harsh, (6) cutting, (7) abrasive, (8) irritating, (9) sarcastic, (10) snide, (11) tension inducing, (12)ridiculing, and (13) cynical.

As with organizational type, a respondent's type of humor was determined by summing his scores obtained for the 13 items measuring the type of humor. Based on the location of his scores in a frequency distribution for type of humor, he was classified as being either an initiator of lubricant humor, abrasive humor or "intermediate humor"--all three being approximately equal sized group.[6] The initiators of "intermediate humor" were excluded from the final statistical analysis since we were concerned only with examining the relationship between two ideal types of humor and two ideal organizational types.

The statistical analysis consisted of testing the three research hypotheses through the use of Chi square using Yate's correction for continuity. All hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance. Since the first hypothesis did not predict the direction of relationship, it was tested by a two-tailed test. The second and third hypotheses were tested by a one-tailed test as they predicted the direction of relationship.

Findings and Discussion

The first hypothesis postulated that the organizational type of person is associated with the type of humor he initiates. The data used for testing this hypothesis are presented in the 2 X 2 contingency table given below, Table 1. The Chi square value for this table was 7.32 which is statistically significant at the .05 level. Thus, we found that the organizational type of person was associated with the type of humor initiated.

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[5]The scale analysis technique used here was similar to the one described earlier in this paper (see page 5).

[6]Although we had planned to form three equal size groups using 33rd and 66th percentiles as cutting points, slightly different cutting points were used to form three groups because of certain tied percentile scores.

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Table 1. The Relationship Between Organizational Type and Type of Humor Initiated

Organizational Type	Type of Humor Initiated		Total
	Abrasive Humor	Lubricant Humor	
Cosmopolitans	12	4	16
Locals	3	12	15
Total	15	16	31

X^2= 7.32—Significant at the .05 level (d.f.=1), two-tailed test.

The second hypothesis stated that cosmopolitans tend to initiate abrasive humor more often than lubricant humor. The data used for testing this hypothesis are presented in Table 2. Of the 16 cosmopolitans, 75% initated abrasive humor and only 25% initated lubricant humor. Since the Chi square value for this table (3.06) is statistically significant at the .05 level, our findings supported the hypothesis that cosmopolitans initiate abrasive humor more often than lubricant humor.

Table 2. The Initiation of Abrasive and Lubricant Humor by Cosmopolitans

Organizational Type	Type of Humor Initiated		Total
	Abrasive Humor	Lubricant Humor	
Cosmopolitans	12 (75%)	4 (25%)	16

X^2=3.06—Significant at the .05 level (d.f.=1), one-tailed test.

The third hypothesis stated that locals tend to initiate lubricant humor more often than abrasive humor. The data used for testing this hypothesis are presented in Table 3. Of the 15 locals, 80% initiated lubricant humor and only 20% initiated abrasive humor. The Chi square value for this table was 4.26 which is statistically significant at the .05 level. Thus, the third hypothesis was also supported. In other words, we found that locals initiate lubricant humor more often than abrasive humor.

Table 3. The Initiation of Abrasive and Lubricant Humor by Locals

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Organizational Type	Type of Humor Initiated		Total
	Abrasive Humor	Lubricant Humor	
Locals	3 (20%)	12 (80%)	15

$X^2=4.26$--Significant at the .05 level, (d.f.=1), one-tailed test.

Thus, our findings supported all three hypotheses concerning the relationship between organizational type and type of humor initiated. In view of the fact that we found organizational members initiating both types of humor, the present study supports the theoretical work of Martineau (1972) who claimed that humor serves as a medium of communication in social interaction and can assume both abrasive and lubricant forms in different settings. The present study goes beyond Martineau's work in that we found an association between organizational type and type of humor initiated.

Our findings provide another useful criterion for distinguishing Gouldner's organizational types, cosmopolitans and locals. We found that cosmopolitans initiated abrasive humore more often than lubricant humor, whereas locals initiated lubricant humor more often than abrasive humor. This behavioral distinction between cosmopolitans and locals adds a useful dimension to the present state of knowledge on this typology.

There are several practical implications following from the findings of the present study. We contend that it would be useful for academic departments to recognize differences in humor initiated by the two organizational types, cosmopolitans and locals. Such an awareness on the part of faculty could well reduce the undue concern that may occur when abrasive humor is initiated. Academic departments might benefit from realizing that abrasive humor is typical of cosmopolitans and will not be eliminated unless cosmopolitans are not hired. In reducing abrasive humor by not hiring cosmopolitans, departments should realize that they might be sacrificing individuals who are highly inclined toward publishing and making professional contributions.

We also contend that the cynicism and ridicule of cosmopolitans should be attended to as many organizational matters might be improved by following the advice sarcastically offered by cosmopolitans. Since persons of this organizational type are oriented toward events outside of the immediate goals of the department, faculty members in taking their humor seriously might benefit by gaining greater insight into professional matters beyond the scope of most locals.

We believe that the use of lubricant humor on the other hand, by locals may represent an attempt on their part to foster amiable relations. While the above probably obtains, it, however, could also be a mistake to consider their humor as without useful function. Instead just as the cosmopolitan contributes competance and professional knowledge through his use of humor, the local's humor is important in that it helps in soothing and overcoming organizational misunderstanding.

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We would like to point out the main limitations of the present study and some directions for future study. Since the present study was conducted in a particular college of an urban university, the findings cannot be generalized to all academic settings and organizations. Further research should be done to test our hypotheses in other universities, in research and development laboratories, and in other organizational settings.

The present study utilized the self evaluated measure of humor initiated which has its own limitations. It is possible that respondents might have misrepresented their humor profile by indicating only the favorable aspect of their humor. Although the self evaluation is a useful approach to measure the type of humor initiated by a person, other approaches such as peer-evaluation, participant observation, and content analysis, should also be used in further studies of this kind.

The present study did not examine the type of humor initated by individuals who were in the middle category of organizational type. Likewise, we did not analyze the intermediate type of humor initated by cosmopolitans and locals. This excluded a relatively large number of individuals from our analysis. A study of the humor initiated by intermediates would be valuable since many persons within an organization fall within this middle category. Also, future research should examine the factors associated with the initiation of the intermediate type of humor.

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